

Kierkegaard in the Anthropocene: Hope, Philosophy, and the Climate Crisis

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Abstract: What is the role of hope in the climate crisis? What type of hope does this crisis demand? How can we sustain hope, in order to resist falling into fatalistic despair or paralyzing fear, whilst always guarding against hope giving way to happy complacency? This essay considers these urgent questions through a novel encounter between the Christian philosophy of Søren Kierkegaard, and recent eco-critical and empirical research on the affectivity of climate change mobilization. I begin by outlining the scope and aims of this essay (Section 1), before introducing some affective dimensions of the climate crisis (Section 2), particularly the place of hope. Next, I examine Kierkegaard's account of hope, and explore the extent to which it corresponds to the type of hope needed in the climate crisis (Section 3). Here, I show that Kierkegaardian hope is a therapeutic practice which subverts the eco-anxiety and sense of helplessness that can otherwise prevent individuals from engaging in positive climate action. Finally, I compare Kierkegaard's theologically grounded hope with the hope held by climate change activists without religious faith (Section 4). Participating in collective climate action anchors the individual's hopes in a larger, collective hope, which I suggest is sustainable in ways that are partially analogous to the therapeutic functions of Kierkegaard's Christian hope.

Keywords: Søren Kierkegaard; hope; climate crisis; ecology and religion

1. Introduction

This essay is an attempt at something new; an exploration of Kierkegaard's thought as a resource for engaging with the climate crisis in which we find ourselves. This essay reveals spaces in which Kierkegaard can enter a dialogue with new ecological perspectives and recent research on the affective dimensions of climate change mobilization. Specifically, it considers the extent to which Kierkegaard's understanding of hope responds to the ecological need for a cautious yet active hope, grounded not in technological or political 'solutions', nor in the complacent positing of an interventionist God, who will act to mitigate the catastrophic effects of anthropogenic climate change.¹

In a recent article, Timothy Robinson observes the emergence of terms, such as "eco-anxiety" and "climate anxiety", which name the psychological burden of processing the deteriorating

¹ Kierkegaard calls the individual to have a personal relationship with God, who intervened redemptively in human affairs through the incarnation, the paradoxically temporal revelation of eternal truth in Jesus Christ (Moser and McCreary 2010). However, Kierkegaardian faith is distinct from complacent, apocalyptic forms of faith, which today advocate we leave our climate change crisis to God, as if this were part God's plan, or as if God will intervene to avert this crisis independently of human action. In *Two Ages*, Kierkegaard criticises the inertia of the present age (Kierkegaard 1978, pp. 68–69, 71, 94). In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard accentuates that, whilst God intervenes in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, divinely (re)-gifting him his son, this gift is possible only by virtue of Abraham's active relinquishment of Isaac, and his lived receptivity to God's word (Carlisle 2016, pp. 279, 289).

planetary climate crisis, and whose proliferation “is manifesting as a crisis of hope” (Robinson 2020, p. 1). On my reading, Kierkegaardian hope emerges as a therapeutic Christian practice which sustains the individual’s capacity to pursue ecological good at a time of potentially overwhelming ecological fragility.

The consoling and upbuilding aspects of Kierkegaard’s authorship are sometimes neglected. However, as Pattison and Jensen note: “whereas many imagine Kierkegaard as being especially preoccupied with the darker side of life”, his discourses reveal that “his aim is precisely not to leave us brooding on whatever darkness afflicts us, but to accompany us on our way to a more open, freer, and more joyous way of living in the world.” (Pattison and Jensen 2012, pp. 99–100) In this essay (Section 3) I undertake a close reading of one of these discourses, ‘Love Hopes All Things—and Yet Is Never Put to Shame’, which Kierkegaard published under his own name in 1847, in the second volume of *Works of Love* (Kierkegaard 1995, pp. 246–63). I also draw from across Kierkegaard’s pseudonymous and veronymous works. This approach is needed because Kierkegaard did not write a book on hope, as he did on despair (*The Sickness Unto Death*) or anxiety (*The Concept of Anxiety*). Rather, Kierkegaard’s thoughts on hope are scattered throughout his works, with his most sustained discussions being found in his upbuilding writings (Fremstedal 2012, p. 51). There are important differences between each of Kierkegaard’s pseudonyms, and between each of these pseudonyms and Kierkegaard, but reconstructing his ideas around hope necessitates drawing from across the authorship.

The place of hope in Kierkegaard’s Christian philosophy had, until recently, received little scholarly attention, but several recent book chapters and articles have begun to remedy this (Burgess 2000; Fremstedal 2012; Kangas 2007; Sweeney 2016; McDonald 2014). There is precedent to discuss the role of hope in Kierkegaard’s thought, but it may surprise some readers to see his name amid talk of anthropogenic climate change and the ecological crisis, not least because of the importance he places on individual subjectivity.² However, as I illustrate in relation to Kierkegaard’s account of hope (Section 3.3), this subjectivity is inherently relational—the self only becoming and flourishing in relation to the becoming and flourishing of others.

2. Hope and the Climate Crisis

A common thread running through philosophical and theological considerations of hope is its ambivalent duality. Hope can result in a happy complacency—one which we cannot afford in our climate emergency. Nietzsche, for example, decried hope as an arch-evil (Nietzsche 1996, p. 45). Even in more nuanced accounts, hope meets a justified reckoning. Writing in response to the election of Donald Trump in the US and in the wake of Brexit in the UK, philosopher Martha Nussbaum describes “idle hope” as “inert and impotent”, and as a potential distraction “from useful work” (Nussbaum 2018, p. 206). Kierkegaard (Constantin Constantius) compares such hope to a “new garment”, which may be “lustrous” but “has never been tried on”, and contrasts this futile, unfulfilled hope with the “indestructible garment” of repetition, which is actually worn, that is: fulfilled in time (Kierkegaard 1983b, p. 132). Hope is dangerous not only in its potential to remain an unfulfilled and distracting fantasy.³ Theologian Catherine Keller, whose counter-apocalyptic vision

² M. Jamie Ferreira notes that “there has long been a pervasive sense that Kierkegaard’s emphasis, throughout his writings, on both “the individual” and the utter transcendence of God precludes his having anything interesting or important to say about relationships between human beings.” (Ferreira 2003, p. 5) Sharon Krishek agrees (Krishek 2009, pp. 2–3).

³ Although beyond the scope of this essay, it is worth noting that this aspect of the ambivalent duality of hope is intertwined with that of the imagination. Kierkegaard posits different forms of imagination. Imagination as *Inbildningskraft* is active and co-operative, and vital to becoming a self. On the other hand, imagination as *Phantasie* leads to stasifying aesthetic disenchantment, where every possibility becomes equally as good—and thereby as cheap—as every other, leading one to lose oneself in a multiplicity of fictive worlds, and shy away from responsibility. Hjørdis Becker-Lindenthal and I discuss Kierkegaard’s theological typology of the imagination in a recent article (Becker-Lindenthal and Guyatt 2019). In a forthcoming article, Becker-

is explored in this volume by Brian Macallan (Macallan 2019), argues that utopian promises can lead, beyond revolution, to totalitarianism, idealistic projections manifesting terror and death (Keller 2018).

The dangers of unchecked, passive hope during a time of climate emergency are manifold: it supposes that things will magically improve of their own accord, allowing individuals, communities, and their leaders to sit back idly. Alternatively, hope that an anonymous ‘someone else’ will step up to address the crisis—another individual, group, or movement—disincentivizes individuals from taking action or lobbying for their leaders to do so.

Despite the potential dangers of hope, both Nussbaum and Keller find constructive roles for a more fragile and catalytic hope. Echoing Kant’s understanding of hope as a “practical postulate”, an improbable, seemingly unreasonable attitude we ought to adopt if we are to manifest certain good actions (Kant 1991, p. 90), Nussbaum describes the “practical habit” of hope as “crucial to the energetic pursuit of a difficult goal” (Nussbaum 2018, p. 210). Keller meanwhile advocates a “hazardous hope”, which “does not know, does not predict”, does not “patiently await”, but rather “grieves even as it activates” (Keller 2018, p. 59). For Kierkegaard, hope—as a sustained and sustaining openness to the good—plays an essential role in human becoming and acting in the world (Section 3).

The role of hope in combating climate change is reflected in contemporary ecological thought, including eco-critical (Head 2016) and empirical (Kleres and Wettergren 2017; Head and Harada 2017; Marlon et al. 2019) research. Ecology, as Timothy Morton writes, concerns not only “global warming, recycling, and solar power”, or even “everyday relationships between humans and nonhumans”, but also “love, loss, despair, and compassion”, “doubt, confusion, and scepticism” (Morton 2010, p. 3).

The scale and urgency of the climate crisis threatens to overwhelm individuals, manifesting in the “crisis of hope” named by Robinson (2020, p. 1). This crisis of hope is problematic, because although we cannot afford unqualified, complacent hope, a more cautious hope enables human beings to project and pursue possible ecologically good actions and realities. An empirical 2019 mixed-methods study involving two USA-wide surveys found hope to be an important predictor “of political behaviours (e.g., donating to an organization) and support for greenhouse gas mitigations policies (e.g., regulate carbon dioxide as a pollutant)” (Marlon et al. 2019, p. 2). Worryingly, this study found that, whilst hope is important in climate change mobilization, many Americans who acknowledge the reality of global warming “cannot express specific reasons to be hopeful that we can address the problem and find it easier to identify doubts” (Marlon et al. 2019, p. 2).

Where is hope to be found? Robinson observes that much recent climate change literature, despite sharing scientific data illustrative of the catastrophic realities, ultimately reassures its reader by locating hope “in technological innovations and political leadership and will” (Robinson 2020, p. 3). However, given current political and economic realities, this faith in technology and politics seems at best optimistic, and at worst deluded and dangerous. Meanwhile, traditional Christian accounts of hope (Robinson looks particularly to Aquinas), like many contemporary Christian eco-theological approaches (Robinson highlights the work of Cynthia Moe-Lobeda (1980, 2013)), “rely ... on the expectation of a transcendent future that comes about as the gift of a transcendent God”, and risk demotivating people to engage in urgent climate change action (Robinson 2020, p. 5). What is needed, then, is an account of cautious, active hope, which is not grounded in blind faith in technology, the whims of politicians, or ecologically indifferent economic markets, nor in the complacent positing of an interventionist God who works in the world apart from human action. In the next part of this essay (Section 3), I explore the extent to which Kierkegaardian hope responds to this need.

Specifically, I suggest that Kierkegaardian hope is therapeutic, a Christian practice through which the individual resists succumbing to the eco-anxiety or climate despair that could otherwise overwhelm her. The satisfying, inhibiting effect of ecological hopelessness is described by one of the

Lindenthal deepens this analysis of the Kierkegaardian imagination, and examines the imagination’s ambivalent relation to the will, using the mystic concept of *Entbildung* (i.e., getting cleansed of images) as a heuristic (Becker-Lindenthal, forthcoming).

Australian climate scientists interviewed by Head and Harada (2017), in their study of the emotional labor of the climate crisis. The scientist, 'Ed' (anonymized), spoke of how:

... you kind of have to be optimistic because if you fall into at least acting from a state of pessimism then you can't break out, you get into a downward spiral. (Head 2016, p. 86)

Ed felt that this hopelessness replicates itself, not only within one particular body, but in fact spreads from one individual to the next, leading to mass climate despondency and inertia:

It becomes a sort of, I guess at first personal weight, but also a weight that gets transmitted from one person to another and therefore, stops us from doing rational things on climate change. And to the extent that we need to do rational things on climate change, it's really important that we're not depressed collectively about the future. That if the future becomes something that's too big to handle and outside our control then we've lost it ... (Head 2016, p. 86)

How are we to resist becoming collectively depressed in the way that this climate scientist describes? In an attempt to answer this question, I will now turn to Kierkegaard.

3. Kierkegaardian Hope in a Fragile World

What is hope? Whether conceptualized as an emotion (Nussbaum 2018, p. 202), a practice (Head 2016, p. 74), or a theological virtue (1 Corinthians 13:13), hope suggests an optimistic anticipation. Hope, like desire, looks forwards. Ernst Bloch, the most influential 20th century theorist of hope, writes: "[H]ope ... dwells in the region of the not-yet" (Bloch 1998, p. 341). However, hope is more diffuse and uncertain than desire. The object of hope may be vague or even unknown, and to hope implies a doubt as to whether this object may be realized. Bloch describes the not-yet region of hope as: "a place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy" (Bloch 1998, p. 341). It is therefore unsurprising that hope is important for Kierkegaard, who was fascinated by the human being's experience and navigation of possibility (Becker-Lindenthal 2020). In keeping with the Christian tradition, Kierkegaard understands hope as based upon the possibility of future movement towards the good—a good which is possible, yet uncertain (Kierkegaard 2009a, pp. 106–13).

To what extent does Kierkegaardian hope respond to the ecological need for a cautious yet active hope, grounded not in technological or political 'solutions', nor in the complacent positing of an interventionist God? In the following pages, I present Kierkegaardian hope as a practice which corresponds to this ecological need in several respects, continually resisting the threat of ecological anxiety or despair. In the first instance, Kierkegaardian hope is this-worldly and active, yet rooted in and sustained by an eternal good (Section 3.1). Second, it constantly anticipates the good, which—in being a path rather than a goal—destabilizes the potentially discouraging effect of a consequentialist ethic on individual acts to counter climate change (Section 3.2). Third, it hopes the best for every human being (Section 3.3). Fourth, it is cautious and attentive, kept in check and catalyzed by its reciprocal relationship with fear (Section 3.4).

3.1. Hope and the Good

According to Kierkegaard's Christian account of hope, hope is not neutral, but is only such insofar as it hopes for the good. Contrary to Nussbaum, we cannot properly describe a fascist dictator as possessing hope for the realization of their evil goals (Nussbaum 2018, p. 210). Instead, Kierkegaard names an expectant relationship to evil not as hope, but as a form of fear. In 'Love Hopes All Things', Kierkegaard writes that: "To relate oneself expectantly to the possibility of the good is to *hope*", whereas: "To relate oneself expectantly to the possibility of evil is to *fear*." (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 249).

For Kierkegaard, hope is only hope insofar as it is hope for the good. And the good is only the good insofar as it is actualized; the good makes an existential claim upon the individual and demands that she actualizes this in and through her life. In 'Love Hopes All Things', Kierkegaard contrasts the

singularity of actuality with the doubleness of possibility, which: “relates to the future, to possibility, which in turn, unlike actuality, is always a duality, the possibility of advance or of retrogression, of rising or falling, of good or of evil.” (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 249)

Kierkegaard’s insistence that hope is only such given that it hopes for the good, which is only such provided that it is actualized, is similar to his repeated veronymous (Kierkegaard 2009b, p. 34) and pseudonymous (Kierkegaard 1987, pp. 173–74; 1981, p. 112) insistence that freedom is also only provided such that it manifests in an active choice for the good. This good or becoming—which Kierkegaard construes variously as faith (Kierkegaard 1990, p. 9), God (Kierkegaard 2009b, p. 39) and bliss (Kierkegaard 2009a, p. 222)—is ultimate and unconditional (Kierkegaard 2009a, pp. 222–28), and is thereby distinguishable from particular, temporal goods, such as material possessions or social standing. For Kierkegaard, to hope for a particular, temporal good is to hope in a merely “earthly” or “temporal” (Kierkegaard 2009b, p. 112ff), or “human” or “natural” sense (Kierkegaard 2015, p. 82f). In comparison, “heavenly” (Kierkegaard 2009b, p. 112ff) or “Christian” (Kierkegaard 2015, p. 82f) hope relates “expectantly to the possibility of the good” (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 249); it expects not this or that particular ‘good’ outcome, ‘fulfilled’ in the attainment or realization of an event, thing or state of affairs. Christian hope is hope for the good.⁴ Paradoxically, Christian hope for one thing—the good—hopes for all things. In *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes de Silentio writes that:

Fools and young people say everything is possible for a human being. But that is a gross error. Spiritually speaking, everything is possible, but in the finite world there is much that is not possible. (Kierkegaard 1983a, p. 44)

Whereas the temporal and the finite is limited, the eternal and the infinite is unlimited. This is the sense in which “Love Hopes All Things”; that “by the decision to choose hope, one decides infinitely more than it seems, because it is an eternal decision.” (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 250) Christian hope, in choosing not “a multitude of things”, but only “the possibility of the good” (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 262), paradoxically chooses infinitely more than a merely human, finite hope.

This Christian hope is radically different to the type of religiosity which climate change mobilization research identifies as perpetuating “false hope”, grounded in the complacent “belief that God or nature will solve the problem without need for human intervention” (Marlon et al. 2019, p. 1). In anticipating a good more perfect than that present in the world, Kierkegaardian hope names present earthly states of affair as inadequate, and empowers the individual to engage in sustained positive action in the world (Fremstedal 2012, p. 56; Simmons 2017, p. 12).⁵ Kierkegaard’s Christian hope is the absurd hope that, “opposed to understanding” (Kierkegaard 1967, p. 247), the eternal good may be realized in time. Johannes de Silentio describes how Abraham was great in respect of precisely this absurd hope:

Abraham was the greatest of all, great by that power whose strength is powerlessness, great by that wisdom whose secret is foolishness, great by that hope whose form is madness (Kierkegaard 1983a, pp. 16–17)⁶

⁴ In his account of Kierkegaard’s metaphysics of hope, Roe Fremstedal identifies a dialectical progression of multiple pre-Christian forms of hope in Kierkegaard. According to Fremstedal’s detailed and convincing account of Kierkegaardian hope, the individual moves through a pre-reflexive, immediate confidence; a rational hope based on calculation and human understanding; and hopelessness—before arriving at Christian hope (Fremstedal 2012, pp. 52–54). Whilst this work is valuable, I do not engage in the dialectical progression or development of Christian hope. Instead, I focus on the extent to which this mature or final Christian hope corresponds to the type of hope needed in the ecological crisis.

⁵ In *Works of Love*—the text in which we find ‘Love Hopes All Things’, and in which the word “hope” occurs more frequently than in any of Kierkegaard’s works (McDonald 2014, p. 163), Kierkegaard construes neighbourly love—self-giving love with God as the “middleterm” (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 107)—as the way in which human beings temporally imitate eternal, divine love (Ferreira 2003).

⁶ For commentary on the relationship between faith and hope in *Fear and Trembling*, see Lippitt’s account of how Abraham had faith by virtue of his hope (Lippitt 2015, pp. 127–29).

Kierkegaard's absurd or 'mad' hope that the an eternal good can be manifested in time is a hope grounded in the individual's faith that her hopes rest not upon her own finite power or abilities, but that 'her' entire existence rests in God's infinite goodness. In an upbuilding discourse (Kierkegaard 1990, pp. 7–29), Kierkegaard explains how "the expectancy of faith" is "victorious", in that it enables the individual to "conquer the changeable" by "the eternal":⁷

When the sailor is out on the ocean, when everything is changing all around him, when the waves are born and die, he does not stare down into the waves, because they are changing. He looks up at the stars. Why? Because they had for our ancestors and will have for generations to come. By what means does he conquer the changeable? By the eternal. By the eternal, one can conquer the future, because the eternal is the ground of the future, and therefore through it the future can be fathomed. (Kierkegaard 1990, p. 19)

As J. Aaron Simmons writes in relation to this passage, Kierkegaardian faith is not, therefore, "an escape-hatch by which we flee existence." It is instead: "an anchor that keeps us tied to existence, but now properly understood as the site for finding ourselves as eternally defined by the relation to God." (Simmons 2017, p. 8) When we expect a particular future outcome, when we hope for a specific good, our hope is unmoored, moving with the changeable tides of temporality. When we expect the victory of faith, however, these hopes become anchored in the steadfast hope of God's eternal goodness. This eternal anchoring means that we are able to hold onto and reinvest ourselves in our hopes for the good for this world, even when this good seems unattainable. In this way, the expectancy of faith sustains and reinvigorates our efforts, maintaining our hope in the face of the apparently impossible. As Kierkegaard writes towards the end of 'Love Hopes All Things': "In eternity everyone will be compelled to understand that it is not the outcome that determines the honor or the shame, but the expectancy in itself." (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 263)

The expectancy of faith undermines a "*worldly, conceited mentality* that would die of disgrace and shame if it were to experience making a mistake, being fooled, becoming ludicrous" by a particular hope not being met (Kierkegaard 1995, 257). Christian hope, which rests in the expectancy of faith, is a *new* youthfulness which transcends the childishness or immediacy of unqualified hope,⁸ without succumbing to:

the moroseness that is frequently honoured with the name of seriousness, the slackness of old age that ... has nothing to do with providing hope, and in unfortunate circumstances would rather grumble peevishly than hope. (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 250)⁹

Kierkegaard's Christian hope opens the possibility of manifesting in this world a good whose infinitude accentuates the inadequacy of the present. In the climate crisis, this hope involves recognizing and striving to transcend the poverty of our planetary situation. Moreover, in anchoring our expectations in the eternal, this hope empowers us to strive always to manifest infinite goodness in our temporal world, without becoming dispirited by the absurdity or difficulty of such a proposition—or, as I will now consider, the efficacy of our particular efforts.

3.2. Hope as Process

To hope is to sustain an anticipatory openness to the improbable possibility of the good. The good is for Kierkegaard not a goal or achievement, but something which is manifested in and through its lived unravelling. The good is not something to be grasped intellectually, nor is it a static goal or

⁷ See also (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 247).

⁸ Fremstedal identifies the first stage of Kierkegaardian hope as "the fresh incentive [*Tilskyndelse*] of youthfulness" (Fremstedal 2012, p. 52). Such naïve hope is briefly embodied in *Fear and Trembling*, by those "[f]ools and young people", who mistakenly talk "about everything being possible for a human being" (Kierkegaard 1983a, p. 44), without realizing that this is not the case for the human being alone, but only for the human being with God.

⁹ Christian hope therefore belongs to what Kierkegaard describes as "second immediacy" (Liu 2016, pp. 219–20).

achievement; the good is manifested in and through one's temporal existence. In 'Purity of Heart', Kierkegaard imagines the good as a path on which the individual makes "progress", "year after year" (Kierkegaard 2009b, p. 17), and as a "road" on which one travels (Kierkegaard 2009b, p. 25). In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Johannes Anti-Climacus defines spirit or self not as a static thing, but as the mediating activity that resides within opposites (Kierkegaard 1983c, p. 13).

Because the good is a lived process, hope—the practice of cautiously but expectantly anticipating this good—is 'fulfilled' only in and through its sustainment. In 'Love Hopes All Things', Kierkegaard explains that as hope "pertains to the possibility of the good, and thereby to the eternal", and because the eternal "extends over the whole of life", there is, and must always be, hope: "a person's whole life should be the time of hope!" (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 251). In this way, Kierkegaard's theological construal of the good as an unfurling path, and of the hope as continually anticipating its unfurling, is therapeutic, subverting a consequentialist ethic that otherwise threatens to discourage or demotivate the individual from engaging in ecologically positive actions. Given the scale and urgency of our global crisis, our individual and collective choices and efforts can often seem futile, their efficacy paling in comparison to the scale of the drastic change needed. Yet, any change will be comprised of precisely this effort. Inhabiting this situation without falling into satisfying cynicism requires hope: not a hope which is complacently consummated or despairingly obliterated in relation to the perceived positive or negligible effects of this or that particular action, but a hope which abides.

Whilst reframing the good as a path or process, and hope as a lived practice, might remedy the despairing eco-cynicism regarding 'the point' or immediate efficacy of this or that particular action, she may still be overwhelmed by the length or scale of this path, and by the unending need to practice hope. The good being something to which we must remain hopefully open to at every moment of each day, year after year, it is easy to see how a human being might become overwhelmed by the uncertainty and duration of this task. In 'Love Hopes All Things', Kierkegaard discusses this difficulty through the analogy of an adult helping "a child with a very big task" (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 252). How does a caring adult go about this?

Well one, does not set out the whole task at one time, because then the child despairs and gives up hope. One assigns a small part at a time, but always enough so that the child at no point stops as if it were finished, but not so much that the child cannot manage it. (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 252)

To avoid overwhelming the child with the enormity of the task at hand, her hope turning to despair, the adult breaks the task down into smaller parts, presenting these to the child bit by bit, over time. Examining this "bootstrapping process" as it unfolds between parents and infants, philosopher Victoria McGeer identifies the development of hope as key to human agency (McGeer 2004, p. 106). Parental scaffolding or mediation of the child's encounters with its limitations enables the child to continue to develop, despite the frustrations he or she experiences on meeting these limitations (McGeer 2004, pp. 107–8). By lovingly preserving the child's specific or temporal hope in this way, such an adult imitates the loving action of divine governance, which preserves individual's general or eternal hope in an analogous way. In *Practice in Christianity*, where we find another adult similarly breaking down and scaffolding a child's task, Johannes Anti-Climacus describes the work of governance this human work imitates as a work that is deceptive, but ultimately loving: "For Governance is love; gentle as it is toward this enthusiastic youth, it does not have the heart to let him understand at the outset that here is a deception, that he is reckoning without his host." (Kierkegaard 1991, p. 191)¹⁰

Whilst Kierkegaard is discussing the breaking down and bootstrapping of specifically Christian hope—by an adult for a child, or by divine governance for the individual—this process is essential to the sustainability of any kind of catalyzing hope. In the climate crisis, it is vital that educators, governments, and organizations not only provide the objective facts of our terrible shared situation,

¹⁰ Becker-Lindenthal and I have shown how, in *Practice in Christianity* and *Fear and Trembling*, Johannes Anti-Climacus and Johannes de Silentio construe the existentially kenotic task of faith as one which divine governance induces in the individual only gradually (Becker-Lindenthal and Guyatt 2019).

but that they propose manageable positive actions that can be taken in the face of this. Indeed, the young climate change activists interviewed by Kleres and Wettergren in 2015 claimed that anger, guilt and blame are inefficient in producing mobilization, and spoke of the need for: “positive messaging, like yes this bad but we can overcome it, and you should be optimistic about what we can achieve.” (Kleres and Wettergren 2017, p. 515) This young activist continued:

We feel like people will be more moved by this positive message than any sort of negative messaging put out there, ‘cause all sorts of research shows you just like shut down, or just don’t respond to negative information” (Kleres and Wettergren 2017, p. 515)

3.3. *Hope for All*

Whilst Kierkegaard’s Christian hope equips the individual to sustain her earthly struggle to manifest the eternal good in a temporal world, the individual can only engage hopefully in this absurd path if she walks it one manageable step at a time. Kierkegaard describes governance as lovingly mediating the individual’s task in this way, and of individuals as imitating this loving work on behalf of their neighbor. Meanwhile, climate change activists articulate a similar requirement for positive and sustained climate mobilization. The work of hope is, in this respect, a social work. Kierkegaard does not outline how this sociality of hope can be acknowledged and supported communally, as we see in today’s new climate movements. Indeed, Kierkegaard makes only reluctant and partial gestures towards an account of community and society (Kirkpatrick 2018).

However, whilst Kierkegaard does not develop a full account of a mutually-hopeful community, we find in his account of hope a principle upon which such a community ought to be founded: that to truly hope is not to hope only for oneself or for only a certain person or group of people, but is to hope for all people:

No-one can hope unless he is also loving; he cannot *hope for himself* without also being loving, because the good has an infinite connectedness; but if he is loving, he also hopes for others. (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 255)

To truly hope to manifest the eternal good in our temporal world, the individual must “continually” hope, “with an infinite partiality”, for this good (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 253). Our hope cannot be self-interested or preferential, but must be faithful to the interconnectedness and shared nature of the good, which is the good for all human beings. This principle is key to our contemporary struggle for climate justice—action in response to the fact that global warming, which effects some groups more than others, is thereby not just an environmental or physical crisis, but always also an ethical and political one.

3.4. *Hope and Fear*

For Kierkegaard, hope is on the one hand a gentle or consoling practice, a work of love which empowers the human being in spite of her situation, the scale or urgency of the task at hand, or the perceived limitations of her actions. However, hope’s consolatory and empowering characteristic must not give way to pure passivity: to “idle” (Nussbaum 2018, p. 206) or “false” (Marlon et al. 2019, p. 1) hope. Hope abides and sustains, but this abiding must be cautious and ever-vigilant, never slipping into self-satisfied laxity. In their empirical investigation into the affectivity of climate-change mobilization, Marlon et al. found that the best catalyst to positive climate engagement is a combination of constructive hope, i.e., “that people—individually and collectively—can reduce climate change” (Marlon et al. 2019, p. 7), and constructive doubt, e.g., “the reality of the threat, the need for more action” (Marlon et al. 2019, p. 1). For our hope to remain constructive, it has to be continually tempered and catalyzed by doubt and fear. Hope is essential for us to sustain our efforts to do ecological good, but for this hope to remain active and realistic, we must be aware of the brevity of our planetary situation, and of the current inadequacy of our global response to this.

The dialectical relationship between doubt or fear on the one hand, and hope or love on the other, undergirds Kierkegaard’s account of the Christian faith. In an 1839 journal entry, he writes:

Fear and trembling (see Philippians 2:12) is not the *primus motor* in the Christian life, for it is love; but it is what the oscillating *balance wheel* is to the clock—it is the oscillating *balance wheel* of the Christian life. (Kierkegaard 1995, supplement, p. 365)

Hope sustains our anticipation of the good, allowing us to invest ourselves wholeheartedly in the absurd task of manifesting this infinite good state of affairs in our finite, fragile world. However, hope, whilst consoling, must always be catalyzing—simultaneously anticipating and activating this good. On Kierkegaard's chromatic metaphor, fear is the weighted, moving balance, which operates in dialectical tension with loving hope, to ensure progressive movement. When we survey the state of our world, we must do so poised to act, with hope that our actions can effect change. Moreover, we must also, at every moment, fix our gaze on the current catastrophic horizon, and on the collective inadequacy of our present response.

4. Conclusion: Hope without Faith?

For Kierkegaard, the hope that abidingly or repeatedly inspires passionate worldly engagement is hope grounded in an embrace of the paradox of Christian faith. This general hope, which faithfully anticipates the possibility of the good, enables the individual to invest herself in specific, temporal hopes, without falling into despair if these hopes are frustrated. Given that this abiding hope is sustained on Christian grounds, what use is Kierkegaard's theological account of hope for ecologically engaged individuals without religious faith?

In the first instance, Kierkegaard's Christian hope provides a model of the kind of hope we need today, in our fragile world: a hope which identifies the inadequacies of the present and catalyzes us to address these; a hope which is cautious yet active; a hope which knows that hope is truly only such given that it is shared hope for a shared good: hope for justice and flourishing, not only for you and I, or for people who live in a particular part of the world, but for all human beings who inhabit the earth.

Is a model of hope all that Kierkegaard's account of Christian hope can provide the individual without Christian faith? In 'Love Hopes All Things', Kierkegaard discusses the relation between pagan or non-Christian, and Christian, hope:

When all misfortunes befell the human race, hope still remained. In this paganism and Christianity agree; the difference is this, and it is an infinite one, that Christianity has an infinitely smaller conception of all these misfortunes and an infinitely more blessed conception of hope. (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 259)

Christian hope is "blessed" in that it rests in the eternal, is grounded in a power and good that is infinitely bigger, and provides infinitely more stability, than any merely contingent, temporal conception of the good. By virtue of this infinite good, the Christian arises "every morning ... [and] renews his hope and refreshes possibility, while love abides and he in it." (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 258) Non-Christian hope, unmoored in the tides of temporality, is unable to joyfully and absurdly hope to manifest infinite goodness in the finite world. On Kierkegaard's reading, the good that non-Christian hope can anticipate for the earth must necessarily be less glorious than that hoped for by faith—that is, by virtue of the absurd. Whilst this may be true, Kierkegaard nevertheless identifies non-Christian hope as a gift:

If you have seen a physician going around among the sick, then you no doubt have noticed that he brings the best gift, better than all his medications and even better than all his care, when he brings hope, when people say, "The physician has hope." (Kierkegaard 1995, pp. 258–59)

Of course, Kierkegaard then continues by comparing the physician's gift of non-Christian hope to the infinite gift of eternity's hope, "the best hope" (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 259). However, non-Christian hope nevertheless holds some value for Kierkegaard; more value, in fact, than any medicine. The doctor's hope for his patient is the gift of possibility of a comparatively good outcome or existence, the possibility of an improved or extended life. The challenge for this non-Christian hope

is its groundlessness, the fact that it is lost if the patient's "sickness" proves to be "unto death" (Kierkegaard 1995, p. 259).

Non-Christian hope may be limited based upon the finitude of the goodness which it anticipates. However, this vision of the good, although finite, can be a smaller or larger vision, and can therefore provide less or more sustenance in the course of pursuing good in and for the world. In what good can the non-Christian individual root her hope? Members of today's climate action movements often ground their hope in a shared vision for a renewed earth and socio-economic order, collectively leaning into an alternative future, as a way of inhabiting and expanding their agency. One of the young climate activists interviewed by Kleres and Wettergren in 2015 told them:

We must continue fighting, that's also why we did the manifesto [up to COP Paris 2015¹¹], whatever happens in Paris [with the agreement¹²] we continue. We simply move on, it is a longterm agenda and it is a life purpose that does not stop tomorrow and if you have once felt that, it is difficult to let go of it again, you just don't stop. It is so existential, it is not just for me, it is for all of us, you see? (Kleres and Wettergren 2017, p. 513)

For this young climate activist, her shared vision of a new, better possible future for the world and its inhabitants serve to ground 'her' hope in something bigger. Participating in organized climate change activism anchors her hopes for a better world in a collective vision. By leaning into a shared hope, participants in climate groups and movements are able to continue to fight for a better possible world, despite this world's present fragility, and in spite of obstacles and disappointments on the way. This is not Christian hope; it rests in a finite vision of the good, which accords only limited stability. However, it is a hope which is therapeutic, enabling those who share it to continuously anticipate or lean into a vision of a better world. Perhaps Kierkegaard might understand it as 'ethical' hope: not hopelessness, nor immediate, childish hope; not an eternal Christian hope; but rather a hope which lends the individual continuity and stability in her pursuit of ecological good.¹³

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¹¹ i.e., The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, which was held in Paris.

¹² The Paris Agreement (*L'accord de Paris*), signed in 2016, is an agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), dealing with greenhouse gas emissions, mitigation, adaptation, and finance.

¹³ It is worth noting that whilst the hope of environmental activism groups is not necessarily a Christian hope, such organisations count among their members many Christians. There is for example a Christian arm of Extinction Rebellion, 'Christian Climate Action' (Williams 2020). There are also many climate change groups which identify collectively as Christian; for a sample of these see (Deane-Drummond 2017, pp. 132–33).

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